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Sergei Hament Corporation
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Soviet Gives Firm Here Rights to Distribute Films

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WASHINGTON, July 26—Soviet authorities have given a New York company a virtual monopoly in the distribution of Soviet motion pictures in the United States and in the production of films in the Soviet Union for showing on American television.

The company, the Hament Corporation of 39 East 12th Street, signed two agreements in Moscow last month for the rights.

Harvey M. Hament, president of the corporation, said at a news conference at the Soviet Embassy that the agreement, with Novosti, the Soviet export film agency, gave his company "first refusal" rights on any films produced in the Soviet Union.

In addition, Mr. Hament said that he had signed an accord with Novosti allowing his company similar priority in co-producing documentary films in the Soviet Union for showing in schools, theaters, or on television here and in Canada.

Novosti, which formally is a non-Government agency, acts as a sort of informational and propaganda body in the Soviet Union, and in recent years has moved into the filmmaking business.

Financial details have not been worked out. Mr. Hament said that each project would be negotiated on its own merits.

Mr. Hament said that the agreements did not cover the filming of "news" events, but he made it clear that henceforth American television companies and producers would have to work through his cor-

poration if they wanted to make films in the Soviet similar to others that have been screened in this country.

He said that a major project would be a filmed television series on Soviet culture about the great museums of the Soviet Union, such as the Hermitage in Leningrad and the Pushkin, Tretyakov and Russian in Moscow.

Mr. Hament said he also planned to produce with Novosti's cooperation a series of film strips on the 15 Soviet Republics for use in schools and universities. He said that under the terms of his agreement he could use either American or Soviet technical personnel.

He said he had already received a number of Soviet films and planned to show them soon to motion picture exhibitors and television network officials.

Up until now, Soviet authorities entertained bids from American film distributors for their motion pictures, but have often complained that they purchased more American films than were bought in the United States.

The only Soviet film in recent years to receive wide distribution in the United States was the Sergei Bondarchuk version of "War and Peace," which won an Oscar for the best foreign film in 1968.

American movie industry executives have generally been critical of the quality of Soviet films and as a result have been reluctant to purchase them for distribution in the United States. A Soviet embassy official said at the news conference that in the last two years,

Moscow purchased 15 American films but could sell only 5 to the country.

Mr. Hament said he planned an extensive promotion campaign, aimed not only at the "art houses" but also at local movie theaters around the country.

He said he hoped to announce "in a few days" time a team of very, very well-known people in the film industry who will work with him on setting up promotion and distribution mechanisms. Some distribution will be handled by his own firm, he said, and some by "major" distributors.

Mr. Hament made it clear that he was entering into the deal as a profit venture, but he said that he hoped Americans could "arrive at a more informed understanding of the interests and culture of the people of the U.S.S.R." from his arrangements.

Resident American television correspondents in Moscow are virtually forced to use Novosti

film crews for their work since American crews are usually not permitted. This has led to complaints of indirect censorship because of Novosti's refusal to film certain subjects.

As for the possibility of restrictions on what he may film, and of censorship, Mr. Hament said: "I'm told we will have no restrictions." He said he had been told he might use his own film crews or work with Soviet photographers, "who are turning out excellent work."

The Hament Corporation, founded by Mr. Hament in 1946, has specialized in photographic and fine art reproduction.

Mr. Hament said the Russians first approached him several years ago when they read about his concern's work in an article published in Amerika, a Russian-language magazine distributed in the Soviet Union by the United States Government. His firm coordinated arrangements for the current Soviet arts and crafts exhibit now touring the United States.